

[Arthur Olmsen]

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RETIRED SWEDISH QUARRYMAN AND WIFE

The insistent imprint of the years was upon Arthur Olmsen. His rich blue Swedish eyes stared aimlessly into space; occasionally a smile flashed in them like a spark from some dying flame. The heavy wrinkled skin, which circumscribed the contour of his large bony face, was partially covered by a growth of whitish stubble. Below the long flattened red nose, and touching part of the upper lip, was a thick, unkempt mustache; like his silky hair it was pure white. His short body had retained its massive appearance, and his hands were those of a quarryman, but it all seemed like burdened weight now.

At seventy-seven Olmsen was in direct contrast to his wife. She was the older by a few months. Her body was bent almost to a forty-five degree angle. But her face had a surprisingly smooth and soft skin and her deeply sunk eyes twinkled and saddened with her mood. She did the talking: "Poor red, he isn't himself. Five years ago he had a shock, and now his memory is not so good," her excellent English was flowered by her quaint Swedish accent. "They said that he was one of the best quarrymen in the country. He seemed to have the practical mind for it.

"Yes, we are both from the Old Country. Dad did all kinds of work in Malma, that's a seaport in Sweden. Finally he learned the quarry business and came to Quincy, Massachusetts to work for the Marimount Granite Quarry Company. I came over about

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the same time. I left my home fifty-eight years ago the twenty-second of May and came to a place called Caster Gardens in New York on the first of July, 1881. I didn't have a home so I made one with the woman I met on the voyage. She had four children. The week after we landed one of the children took sick. She died in a week. The day that we buried her, the youngest child took sick. She died in two days. After this misfortune we moved to Chicago. I liked Chicago. I liked Chicago more than any place that I have lived in. Two years later, I came to Quincy and met Arthur there."

As if shaken from his trance-like dream, Mr. Olmsen sat up straight in his chair. His large frame expanded with pride at the mention of his early days. Broadly smiling, he said, "I must have been pretty handsome. She went all over the country and wasn't satisfied till she saw me." Then he seemed to lapse back into a vacant daze.

"We were married in Quincy," she went on in an even tone of voice as if she were reading from a book. "Then Dad got a job with the [Wetmore?] and Morse Granite Quarries. When he came to the [Hill?], they were losing money. All the good granite was covered by grout and all that they had to cart it away in was a team. He built a box car to take this grout away, and then they were able to get the best granite. But some of the men were jealous of Dad. You know, he was from outside and they did not like that. But 3 old Jim Boutwell, he was the manager of the quarry, he shoved him up a few pegs and told the rest of the men to obey his orders. After two years Dad had made lots of money for them. One day Frank Corry told him that they had to pay \$55,000 income tax. You can see that they made a lot of money. Then they made him the general superintendent of the quarry. He had five foremen under him. He put up most of the derricks that are up there now. He never went to school but he had it in him to build things like that. Once when he was engineering the building of a derrick, he had this old carpenter working for him. Whenever Dad explained or had him do something the fellow would say 'very sensible.' Even though the carpenter could not think of those things himself, he could understand that they were practical when

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explained to him. That gives you an idea about Dad's ability. And he use to often repeat that little story in Swedish later. Once in a while he does now.

"In 1922, we moved to [Drattleboro?]. Dad got a job with Presbrey's. We stayed there till 1928 and then moved back to Barre. And he began to work again for Wetmore and Morse and stayed there till the time of the fire. I think that that fire must of scared him. It happened one day when he was working at the office. They think that some one set it. I don't know. but Dad suddenly became almost crazed, and with twice his strength he broke through a locked door to get a trunk that was in the next room. 4 The trunk was filled with valuable papers. It was heavy enough for two men but Dad hollered out the window to be careful below and then he picked it up and threw it right through the window. He got out all right. But the next morning he didn't know anyone except me. And then he started to ask for the children who had been away for years. He could not understand why they were not at home. Gradually he hot well. But his nerves were gone. And his memory...."

Mrs. Olmsen looked at her husband. Pride swelled up in her heart and in her eyes, but her voice remained the same, "Dad use to tell me not to become excited when things went bad. I have done pretty well. Poor Dad..."